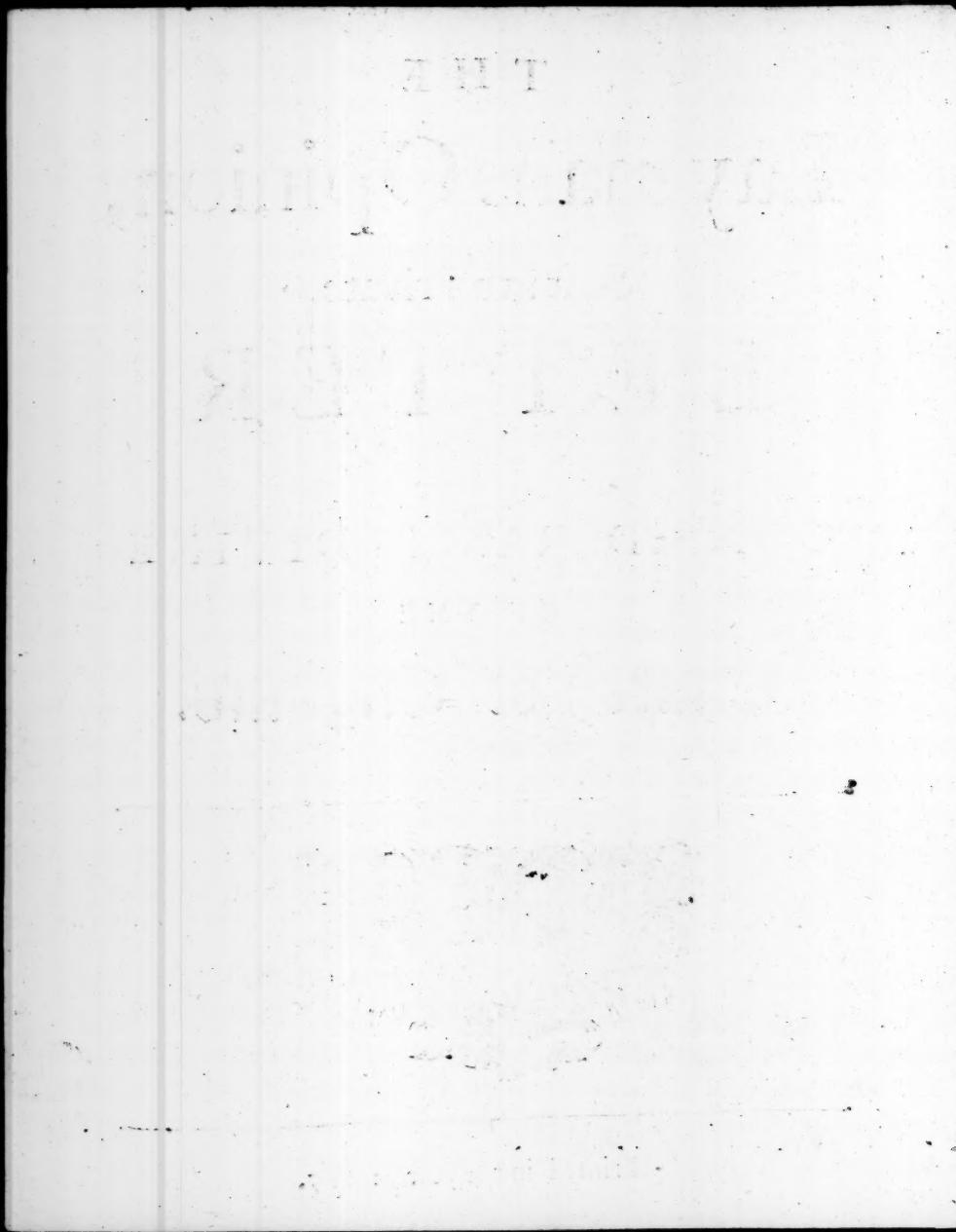


THE
Lay-mans Opinion,
Sent in a Private
LETTER
TO A
CONSIDERABLE DIVINE
OF THE
Church of England.



Printed in the year 1687.



Reverend Sir,

From my House at —
the 2d. of June, 1687.

I Received yours by the last Post, wherein I find your kindness makes you think me more capable than I really am of giving Advice in so critical a time as this: but however, that deserves all the return I am able to make, and accordingly whatever failings I commit, will I hope be still a greater demonstration of my compliance and Friendship.

You desire to know my Opinion of the Church of *England's* way of proceeding in this extraordinary conjuncture; and what I intend to do my self, as well as advise you to on this occasion.

To speak of this is a very tender point, and touches the quick in a man of my Principles who cannot but still continue an unworthy Member of this Church of *England*, and consequently love it with all its faults; but then you may imagine, or rather 'tis above imagination how concern'd I am to see it now commit a thousand indiscretions, which our Enemies will have some cause to call by a worse name, if we persist any longer in them.

We began the best in the world, or rather we continu'd doing so, at the settling this King in his Throne, and our selves in his good opinion. What has fatally alter'd our way of proceeding, that was so equally wise and honest? For that 'tis alter'd, is alas too plain in all these following instances, and it would not be a Friends part to disguise it.

Did we not in both Houses of Parliament oppose the King's giving Employments to his Friends and Fellow-Sufferers, and not only so, but highly reflected on his Honour and Justice in doing it? So that he rather chose to lose a great Supply, than his good Opinion of us, which we must have forfeited, if we had continued any longer to disoblige him.

You will say perhaps, the consequence of that connivance, and the enlargement of his favours to *Roman Catholicks* ever since, has but too much excused and even justified our suspicion then; but, now, we the well-meaning men of our Party are apt to blame it the more; for 'tis not the first time that unreasonable Jealousie has produced the very thing suspected; and besides, we had but little cause to grudg at his shewing inclination to his own Principles, when in all essential matters he complied with ours.

But to go on with the same freedom among Friends. Have not a great many of our considerable Clergy-men been declaiming once a week against the *Roman Catholicks*, who all this while are either very modest, or forbid to follow so indiscreet an Example? Tho 'tis obvious enough what an advantage they might have in such a Rhetorical Combat, bearing the King before them as a Buckler, whom neither the Laws of the Land nor of good manners allow us so much as indirectly to aim at.

Do not our Universities themselves, those meer Creatures of Power and Favour, who are only beholding to the Laws of late days, and the dispensing Power of the Prerogative, for not being held to the Observation of all those Rules which are instituted by *R. Catholick* Founders? Do not these very men, I say, flie in the face of Authority, and like the Snake in the Fable, sting that Bosom which warms them?

I know you are too ingenuous to deny the least part of this to a Friend, who reckons all this up, not by way of Accusation, but only as Penitents confess their faults, with Tears and real sence of Human Frailty; which I hope may be forgiven in a poor Church that is far from pretending to an Infallibility.

Therefore I know your answer is, That 'tis true we have done all this, but with a great deal of reason. What is that?

that? You reply; The belief we are all every day confirm'd in, that by serving the King, we only ensnare our selves in assisting the Church of *Rome* which is endeavouring our Ruin; for if to the Zeal, Magnanimity, and indefatigable Industry of the King, we add the heightening his Prerogative, and the firmness of all his Protestant Subjects both in his Armies and Parliament, what imaginable hopes is there to put the least delay to an universal change of Religion?

You see I have put the Objection fairly, and as strongly as the Case will bear; for God forbid there should be any flattery or fallacy among Friends; and I know 'tis in vain to use either of them in Argument, or indeed to argue at all in order to convince people, unless out of their own Principles and Practice.

Granting then all you pretend, which is much more than you can prove, that such a compliance as is desir'd at our hands, is the way to bring about His Majesty's Designs; and that those designs are to re-settle Popery; yet notwithstanding, I think it as evident as all our Rules of Christianity and Reason, that we are bound in conscience to be intirely passive in all things so design'd by such a lawful Sovereign as I am sure our Loyalty has sufficiently demonstrated we acknowledge the present King to be.

And tho you doubt perhaps of my undertaking, yet I am confident your wanted Charity and Justice will hinder you from being surpriz'd at it: for what should oblige me to a passive compliance with a Church so opposite to my own, except the meer sense of my Duty, and that obligation of Loyalty which is the first Principle with me, and so inculcated by the Church of *England* her self, that if any thing could make me suspect her, it would be the seeing her want at this time that inherent Mark of Honour and Justice, which so well and gloriously distinguish'd Her from all other Sects in the World.

Our

Our Clergy, I find, at present go upon this ground, that in all things relating to the State, we ought not only to be Passive, but Instrumental in our most zealous endeavours ; but in such a Case as this, a Church Matter, where the Protestant Religion is so much concern'd, we are to obey God rather than Man, and stop, if it be possible, the approaching Inundation.

Now, I would fain ask our Zealots how far 'tis lawful to proceed in this Opposition : I am confident they are too wise and honest to make it reach to Arms or any open Obstructions to the Government ; for that was abhor'd by the Primitive Christians even against the persecuting Heathens.

Well then, 'tis only to go thus far. We are in Pulpits even at the very Court (which by the way would be thought a strange Indecency in any Gentleman's Chapel) to exclaim against the Religion of our Sovereign, and brand it with Idolatry it self, a Mark, like that on Cain, to invite every body to do him a mischief.

We allow our selves in the Universities, not only to declaim more boldly, but to deny Obedience to a *Mandamus*, which only dispences with what we our selves have on several Occasions allowed to be omitted, so that it seems we do not deny a dispensing Power, but only except against it in the Supreme Magistrate.

We take also this further Liberty, that if the Bars are desired to be taken away from between the King and his Friends, that they may be in the same Capacity with others of doing him and the Nation Service ; those Rods that were only made to be the shameful Instruments of Punishment to the King himself, who suffer'd under their lash sufficiently, are it seems not thought fit to be broken, but rather to be hung up in *Westminster-hall*, as a Trophy of so infamous a Victory past, and as a Terror for the time to come. And this is such a Point of Conscience with

with some of us, that we must on that account quit those places to which we had no other pretence of Merit, but our having opposed those Laws formerly, which yet out of a fatal stubbornness we refuse now to Repeal.

But these Gentlemen are rather to be pitied than blamed in comparison of a great many others, who cunningly keep their Places still with a subtle Whisper or two, and then as slyly cast a look of contempt on all their Master does or designs ; who think themselves so dexterous as at the same time to convince the King of their being his Friends, tho it never appear'd so before they were his Subjects ; and to convince us of their Zeal, tho we never saw the least of it, till now , that it becomes a little out of season. How many Faces have we seen of late constantly at the Kings Protestant Chappel, who were strangers enough there before, to make a whole Audience rise up and stare at their coming in. 'Tis of these, I believe, the Author of *Hudibras* has prophesied.

As if they worshipp'd God for spite.

These stand sometimes on the Threshold of the Kings Chappel to hear *Sefache* Sing, but would rather be made like him, than stay a moment longer, trembling alas out of scruple of Conscience , that Conscience which is commode enough on all other occasions, so that 'tis a shrewd Sign the poor innocent is wrong'd here, and not so morose as is pretended, if they would but put it to it's complaisance, which never fails them in all other Temptations : this I say not so much to censure them, as to vindicate our Church, which condemns no man for staying at Divine Service in any Christian Congregation, but rather blames so nauseous an Affection of Zeal and Faction.

Well then, pray give me leave to ask what does all this proceeding mean ? May we not oppose the Government, and yet may we do all these things ? Alas, what does

does such an Equivocation signify, unless to render us a sort of sneaking Party, more afraid of the Laws of the Land, than of Gods? For can any man believe himself a Hundred part so mischievous in drawing his Sword at an Insurrection, as in telling 500 People at a time in the Name of God that the Religion their King Professes is rank Idolatry?

Does any reasonable man imagin that several things which our Laws make Treason, are half so bad and dangerous as a Trimming double-dealing Courtier, who has nothing in him of Religion, but his contradicting the Kings?

If we continue thus, indeed we are not bare faced Rebels against the Government as our Sectaries once were, but I doubt we are little better than Spies under the Protection of it; which is no great advantage in the comparison.

We have all the Benefices, all the Church Preferments, and only for fear of losing them, we do enough to forfeit them; like People that die, only for fear of Death.

Did we pull down a Pope to set up a King? And are we pulling down a King, or at least tugging with him to set up our selves?

What pretence have we of all the World for doing this? We have no private Spirit to guide us in such dark paths.

We have no Infallible Council to secure us against any doubts of Conscience, and all Objections of human reasoning: We have Listed our selves under a King ever since *Henry* the 8ths time, and, like *Eops* Horse, are obliged to bear him for our Rider ever after. Which is the humble Opinion of,

Your most Faithful Friend,

W . D.

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